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ABSTRACT

A survey of 14 teachers at a central Virginia school investigated their attitudes concerning their involvement in students' problems outside of the school. In addition, 33 fifth grade students were surveyed concerning their attitudes about teachers' involvement, and interviews were conducted with two teachers, one principal, and one counselor. The survey instrument focused on the problems of divorce, sexual abuse, and alcohol abuse; hindrances to getting involved; successful and unsuccessful efforts; home visits; and teacher role. Analysis of results addresses the issues of parental neglect and apathy, the importance of teacher listening and encouragement, factors determining extent of teacher involvement, and students' comfort in telling teachers their problems. Results indicated that teachers feel the pressure of students with overwhelming problems that are out of their control, yet still get involved. Others leave the problems for the guidance counselor to handle and choose not to get involved. The majority of students did not feel comfortable telling their teachers about their problems. Appendixes contain the survey instruments and interview questions. (Contains 25 references.) (JDD)

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ATTITUDES OF INVOLVEMENT WITH STUDENTS' PROBLEMS OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL

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ATTITUDES OF INVOLVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates teachers' attitudes of their involvement in students' problems outside of the school. Surveys were distributed to teachers at a school located in the central Virginia area. These surveys included fourteen short answer questions that asked questions concerning their involvement with students' problems outside of the school such as divorce, single parent homes, abuse, etc. Along with these surveys, two 5th grade classes at the same school were surveyed concerning their attitudes about teachers' involvement with their problems outside of the school. I also interviewed two teachers, one principal, and one counselor to obtain more thorough feedback concerning their attitudes about teachers' involvement concerning their students' problems outside of the school. I hypothesized that teachers would vary in their level of involvement and that some would be extremely involved in their students' problems outside of the school while others will choose not to get involved as much. Results indicate that teachers feel the definite pressure of students with overwhelming problems that are out of their control yet still do get involved. Others leave the problems for the guidance counselor to handle and choose not to get involved. In conclusion, the results were as expected in that teachers get involved depending on how they individually feel compelled to.

ATTITUDES OF INVOLVEMENT WITH STUDENTS' PROBLEMS OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL
CHAPTER I: *THE PROBLEM*

Need

Unfortunately, the number of students in our classrooms today who bring problems to school are increasing. It is unreasonable to expect these children to deal with these problems and still expect them to be able to concentrate on math problems or sentence construction. Teachers' involvement in students' problems outside of the school is vital in helping the children cope with their parents' divorce, abuse, etc. It is inevitable that as teachers we are going to have students in our classrooms who are struggling with more than multiplication. We are going to have students with problems that are sometimes far beyond our comprehension because we do not even know how to go about helping the child. It is vital that as teachers, we need to know what our roles are in relation to the guidance counselor and the principal in helping the child to cope with the problem that he/she is going through everyday. Therefore this study will be insightful in the way that teachers view their involvement level with the students' problems outside of the school.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine teachers' attitudes of their involvement with students' problems outside of the school. Students today are forced to endure so many problems that are outside of the school. This study attempts to determine the attitudes of the teachers concerning their involvement with students' problems that are outside of the school. The study will answer questions concerning whether teachers are getting involved, do they want to get involved, how getting burned out, what are the roles of teachers along with the guidance counselor, etc... Since the topic of this study does not lend itself to an in-depth study because of the sensitivity of the issue, the purpose is mainly to determine the attitudes of the teachers as well as some students.

Hypothesis

I hypothesize that teachers will have varying attitudes concerning their involvement in students' problems outside of the school. There will be a varying range of attitudes of the teachers depending on the number of years they have taught to whether they are married and have any children of their own. These may be some possible factors that play into the involvement level of the teachers. I believe that most teachers will want to get involved in their

students' problems but there will be a number of hindrances that get in the way of getting deeply involved. Some of these hindrances may be lack of time, fear of getting burned out, and a lack of control over the home environment of the children.

Overview

In the following chapters I will discuss details of my study further. In Chapter II, I will discuss the literature found concerning the problems students may face outside of the school. It was difficult finding previous studies dealing with the attitudes of teachers' concerning students' problems outside of the school. A great deal of my research I found dealt with the stresses and the different range of problems that children face such as divorce and different kinds of abuses. Although the literature I found was limited I found many stories of teachers who have experienced dealing with troubled children which helped me in my study.

In Chapter III, I will discuss the design of my study concerning the sample, measures, specific design, analysis, and the summary.

In Chapter IV, I will give an analysis of the results of my study. I will determine whether my hypotheses were correct and will explain the results and the implications of them in detail.

CHAPTER II: *REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE*

Introduction

When one thinks of teachers and involvement they seem like an ordinary combination because teachers are supposed to get involved in their students' lives whether it is at home or school. It may seem like an unusual thing for teachers not to get involved in the lives of their students but it is more complex than people generally think. Teachers everywhere get involved with their students whether it is by teaching them a new concept or by asking them how their assignment is going, but do they get involved deeply in their students' personal lives? There are dozens of facets to this question and they all need to be taken into consideration.

In our classrooms today there are more and more students who bring loads of baggage to school concerning their divorced parents, alcoholic parents, abusive parents, and dozens of other situations at home that affect students. It is completely unreasonable to ask or to even expect students to leave their baggage outside the door of the school and concentrate completely on their studies while they are in school. Students should feel free and comfortable enough in a school setting to talk to teachers about their problems at home. But then there is the question of the role of teachers. It is a fact that

teachers' roles are rapidly changing, but I think that it is inevitable that teachers today need to understand that the children of yesterday are very different from the children of today. Children today face so much stress concerning their family problems alone not including the outside pressures from peers and society. The effects of broken and dysfunctional homes today are taking their toll on our students.

As I was researching this topic I was amazed at the number and the range of situations and problems that a child can face. No wonder there are so many dropouts and at-risk students in our schools. As teachers, we must open our eyes and see that our classrooms are made up of sexually abused kids, children with single parents, physically abused children, children of divorce, children with alcoholic parents, or children who have experienced death in the family. The list does not stop there and there are more situations in the home that a child is forced to experience at a very tender age. As teachers recognize the desperate need for these students, they can make an impact and help them go through whatever problem they may go through at home.

The research was difficult because there was hardly any literature on the specific attitude of teachers in their involvement with students' problems outside of the school. The literature mainly consisted of the problems that

children face outside of the school such as divorce, death. and abuse. The literature I found were related to "troubled children " who are faced with tough times at home and how their teachers help them cope. But the specific attitudes of these teachers were not in the literature. However, I found that the attitudes of the teachers who help children cope with such problems could be inferred.

Divorce

Children growing up these days face an overabundance of problems at such a young age. When we look at some of their faces we can tell that they are the faces of children who come from dysfunctional homes with problems of divorce and all kinds of abuse. The most common problem that children seem to face these days is divorce. According to research, "in 1990 close to one third of the children in the United States can expect that before their eighteenth birthdays, their parents will be divorced" (Frieman, 1993, 58). The divorce of parents can cause dramatic effects on children and often lead to confusion. Since the issue of divorce among children in our classrooms is very familiar to them, teachers especially need to be tuned in to the symptoms of children going through the divorce of their parents. Children can either act out their feelings in a very disruptive way by fighting or in a passive way by

withdrawing. This is their way of dealing with the divorce of their parents and teachers need to be their to help them.

According to Frieman, his studies with children of divorce indicates that they want their teachers to know about their family's situation. Some very useful information is that these children said that if their teachers were aware of the family's situation, then the children would be able to study better in school. At such a young age, these children are in desperate need of emotional support at such a tough time of their life. Teachers can readily give them the emotional support they need because they are consistent in their lives because they see them for a majority part of the day for 5 days a week. Teachers can also call home to find out the family's situation only if they suspect that something is going on and is affecting the child. Teachers desperately need to know the condition of each child in their classrooms. A teacher who is aware of a separation or a divorce in a particular child's family will be able to meet the needs of the child better. A teacher who is sensitive to the child dealing with divorce will be able to understand the child if he/she acts out or behaves in an inappropriate manner in the classroom. A teacher's role for these children is to be someone who will listen to their frustrations and confusions and reassure them that the problem is not their fault. Teachers

should be there to listen to the children who want to open up to them. An important thing that a teacher should do is to create an atmosphere where the child does not feel threatened and who feels free to express his feelings about the problem at home. The teacher can provide activities in the classroom with music or art or other various ways to draw the child out. It is important to remember that teachers cannot solve the students' problems but they can help them cope with the pain (Frieman, 1993). When a child goes through the problem of divorce in his family, there is another problem of blended families that come into play. This can cause further frustration and confusion for the child and could cause more delay for the child to recover from the trauma of a divorce. Research shows that when steprelations were caused by death rather than divorce the relations were a lot better (Skeen, 1984). The techniques teachers use to handle with children dealing with divorce can be appropriate for children in stepfamilies as well.

These children who go through the pains of divorced parents often have to deal with living with a single parent. If this is due to a divorce, the child may have to be faced with the situation of having to go from one parent to another which causes great instability. If the situation is due to a death of a parent then the child must deal with questions of why and will go through a

period of depression or anger. Without a doubt, a child living with one parent as opposed to two will face more difficulties and challenges in their lives. Again the teacher needs to be sensitive to these children and be on the look out for specific symptoms. Teachers can determine whether they need special attention at school and cater to their needs. A teacher can be the child's friend as well and be a listening ear. A very important and often overlooked fact is that "children need education , not only about math, science, and spelling, but also about life, and death, and how to survive trouble" (Allers, 1982, 70).

Sexual Abuse

Another unfortunate but common problem that children in our classrooms face is sexual abuse. According to research, "sexual abuse is one of the most common yet least reported crimes" (Roehl & Burns, 1985, 19). Girls can subtly mention their experience with sexual abuse for instance by talking about her father and the "games" he forces her to play (Roehl & Burns, 1985). Teachers need to be extremely aware of the possibilities of such subtleties because some children, especially at such a young age, are completely unaware of what is going on with them aside from the fact that something is not normal behavior. According to Allers (1982), the victims of sexual abuse are overwhelmingly female children and the offenders are male.

It is not uncommon for teachers to have sexually abused children in their classrooms. But what is a teacher supposed to do or say? Are teachers trained for this kind of thing or should they be? Whether they are or not trained, it is inevitable that children are going to ask their teachers for help to seek their protection. It is a very difficult situation to be in but teachers need to be open, sensitive and patient and must be very aware of the child's needs to be nurtured, cared for and protected. It is important to establish trust with the child. In the case of sexual abuse, teachers are required to report any suspected cases to the police or child protective services.

Alcohol Abuse

Children of alcoholics (COAs) in the classroom are another group of children that teachers must deal with. According to research, "an estimated 4 to 6 children in a classroom of twenty-five students are COAs" (Knight, 1992, 367). Teachers can play a crucial role in helping these children cope with the stress that comes with having alcohol abuse in the home. Parental alcoholism can definitely interfere with the child's school performance. Therefore teachers need to be ready to support and assist COAs to effectively deal with the problem they face. A survey of teacher perception and training needs were conducted in dealing with COAs and the results showed that these

teachers are generally willing to assist COAs, but they felt that they need more training. They feel inadequate about the problems and the needs of COAs. It is a difficult situation because again the problem of teachers' roles come in because teachers today are forced to be all things for their students. If a teacher is going to be effective as a teacher then he/she must be fully equipped to meet the needs of their children even if they are COAs.

At-risk Students

If teachers are supposed to be equipped and sensitive to meeting the needs of the children who are in desperate need of emotional help then we should know who these kids are. When I was doing my research on this topic, I found many literature on at-risk students. According to Frymier (1992), he states that there are five factors emerging that affect children detrimentally: personal pain, academic failure, socioeconomic situation of the family, family instability, and family tragedy. The question is not are there children at-risk, but instead the question is what are the teachers doing to help these at-risk students? According to research it seems that there are efforts being made to help these children at-risk. The data shows that these children were given instructional attention and were placed in smaller classes, provided tutors, referred to psychologists, and provided special teachers (Frymier, 1992). The

students who were in the schools that made such efforts were different than the students who were not given this kind of help. Unfortunately there are an overabundance of at-risk students in our schools but it is encouraging to see that there are teachers who are making concerted efforts to help them.

Resilient Children

A topic that relates to the literature that I found on "troubled children" is children, who even in the midst of trauma and numerous risk factors prevail: these children are called resilient children. The reason that I mention resilient children is because one of the main reasons that these children are able to look beyond their pain and suffering is because there is usually one caregiver who plays a key role in their lives. According to Werner (1984), "most resilient children establish a close bond with at least one caregiver from whom they received lots of attention during the first years of life" (69). This shows that teachers can make such a huge impact on the outcome of a child's life. A favorite teacher can act as a an important buffer against adversity in the lives of resilient children. These teacher provide what these children lack at home. In these situations, it is hard not to think that teachers would choose not to get involved in a child's home life. It is encouraging that the reason that these children are called resilient children is because they have endured the pain of

adversity and in some cases because a teacher cared, the child can have hope and faith in the future.

There is a success story of a resilient girl named Amy. Amy's father abandoned her when she was an infant and her mother neglected her by maintaining various relationships with men. Her mother rarely communicated with Amy although she clothed and fed her. Amy was unable to have bowel movements for 12 hours or more when her mother locked her in her room when the men came to visit her. With the pleading of a principal , a teacher became Amy's homebound instructor and got deeply involved with Amy. Amy had to be treated for depression, low-self esteem due to being overweight, and numerous other problems that she had to deal with. It is incredible what a child is forced to endure at such a young age. Fortunately, Amy's story is a success because someone cared enough to get involved. According to Tarwater, every child needs, a "significant other", someone who truly cares and respects the child as an individual (Tarwater, 1993). There are unfortunately too many Amy's in our classrooms. We as teachers must attempt to be this "significant other" to those children who are in need. If this teacher chose not to get involved, Amy would not be where she is now.

Home Visits

Teachers can play one of the biggest roles in a child's life especially when the child is suffering through major problems outside of the school. Some teachers have been known to visit a child's home and get deeply involved with the family by being in the environment which is causing problems for the child. This is a great way to observe the child's home environment and show parent(s) that as a teacher you care and want to help. In an article by Fox-Barnett and Meyer (1992), teachers make home visits to each of their children. This is a program in the Early Childhood Research Center at the State University in New York at Buffalo where the children act as hosts and hostesses to their teachers when they come to visit them at their homes. After the visit there is a follow-up during a circle-time discussion in which the teacher and the child share the experience with the rest of the class. This is an example of a more structured program, but in a regular school I am not sure of whether there are any programs like this where a teacher can conduct such similar home visits. The purposes of these home visits are to get to know the children better and to build their self-esteems. This program is more of a preventive type where the teacher goes and visits the home of all the children regardless of whether they have major problems at home or not.

Most of the home visits that I have been exposed to are the ones that are conducted mainly in the cases of troubled kids where the teacher may suspect a problem in the home. But these home visits mentioned in this article emphasize a child-centered approach in which a non-threatening experience is provided for everyone. The teacher is not there to see what is wrong or to counsel or teach. Home visits are a great way to build stronger relationships with parents and to build the self-esteems of the children.

Effects of Getting Involved

A serious problem at home does not only affect the child but once a teacher gets involved he/she may be emotionally and physically drained. These teachers must be sensitive and caring and also must create a safe and nurturing environment for the children to promote the recovery and healing necessary for the child (Carlile, 1991). Clark in 1988 discussed a case of a girl named Danielle. One teacher felt frustrated and inadequate as she desperately wanted to help her student, Danielle, whose father had molested her and as a result was sent to jail (Clark, 1988). This story along with dozens more seem to reveal a commonality among teachers who get deeply involved like this particular teacher. They are frustrated at the situation and although they feel a deep need to help the child they feel an overwhelming

sense of inadequacy. It is difficult to know what to do in a certain situation. In this particular case, the teacher contacted the mother of the child and was faced with a bitter and antagonistic parent. The teacher allowed the mother to talk and then brought up a counseling program for Danielle which she agreed to. Rarely can teachers help the child and the family on their own in severe situations because teachers are not trained to do the work of psychologists or a counselors. So in many cases, teachers will refer the child to a psychologist or a counselor or a social worker to help the child in the way they need. Soon after Danielle started her program, she developed a close bond with the psychologist and her self-esteem improved. But in this particular case, which is not too uncommon, Danielle took a giant step back. Her mother was sent to jail for drug charges and she started to slide again. The teacher spent lots of personal time with Danielle and tried to comfort her. But in this story something happened that can easily happen in classrooms and which can cause concern for teachers. Since the teacher was spending lots of time with Danielle the other students felt neglected and voiced this to the teacher. The teacher addressed this problem to the students while Danielle was out.

There is such a fine line between how much time and attention to give to one suffering student compared to the rest of the class who feels neglected.

It makes sense to give the attention to the child who is suffering, but then do you put your class on hold for a while? This teacher seems to think that her time and effort in helping Danielle was worth it. Danielle continued to see the psychologist and she still had a long way to go to heal her scars, but the teacher takes comfort in that Danielle was not one of those students who slipped through the cracks.

Failed Efforts

There are many success stories of teachers getting involved with children with home problems. But there are stories where students are left hanging by their strings they cling on to for help. It may be because the teacher is unable to devote much time and energy to one child, not due to the fault of the teacher, but just because it is difficult to reach every child. This was the case with a child named Luke (Howe, 1992). Here is a kid who came in late to class at least three days a week. He would seldom have a note and make excuses that he was sick. The teacher found out that Luke's mother, a single parent, worked while trying to take care of her two kids. She did not want to lose them because she had almost lost her daughter. It is a pathetic sight to see children at such a young age go through so much as Luke is forced to in this case. As this teacher talked to his mother she looked at Luke,

"How small and vulnerable he seemed. His head was bowed but I could see the tears running down his cheeks. His hands, clenched in front of him, were trembling (26)." What a sight!! In Luke's situation, there seemed to be not much help done mainly because the teacher did not and could not get as much involved as some teachers do.

The statistics are against us because as the rate of dysfunctionalism in our homes seems to rise by the looks of the makeup of the students in our classrooms, teachers are being stretched to take on the roles of counselors, psychologists as well as social workers. Teachers are faced with so many children living and having to deal with broken and dysfunctional homes. In a way they are forced to be all those things as one individual. It seems like such a big and an impossible task for teachers to be responsible for such kids. But then it makes you wonder what will become of these kids? Do we want them to fall through the cracks like Luke might? Or what would have happened if Danielle's teacher did not care? It's a very tough situation because as a teacher you want to help a child in need and yet you do not know how far to take it. These children need attention and to know that they are cared for. It sounds like a simple answer for such a complex situation, but that is where it can start. As teachers we cannot be expected to know about every problem

and situation that every child brings into the classrooms. But as teachers we should be ready to nurture and refer these children to anyone else who may be more help to them after we have done all we could.

Most of the research seems to point to the fact that getting deeply involved in childrens' home problems are effective, but let's look at the other side of the coin. What happens if there are more than two or three troubled students like Danielle or Luke? How is one teacher supposed to meet the needs of these students and get involved personally with their home problems? It is a situation of getting burned out. Because of the issue of getting burned out many teachers may choose to not get involved and merely teach lessons and choose not to believe what they can obviously see in a suffering child's eyes. This is not to be cold but rather it is a common and understandable thing for a teacher to not want to get involved in a child's home life. It is draining and painful and sometimes it may seem better for everyone not to rock the boat. Every situation is different but I wonder what kind of impact or difference it would have made to get involved rather than to get too absorbed with how it would affect your own life or emotions. This is a question I even ask myself. It is a question that each of us as teachers must ask ourselves and come to a conclusion where we feel at peace with ourselves about.

Non-teacher Caregiveers

The deep level of involvement with students' home problems seem to occur most effectively with non-teachers such as specific caregivers in a child day care center or social workers. As a caregiver or social worker, they are able to devote their complete energy and time to a child's home situation and not concern themselves with teaching a child fractions or about Christopher Columbus. When a teacher has 20 or more other students to take care and be concerned for it is difficult for the teacher to focus all of her time and energy to one or two students. For example, in an article by Rosemary Burton (1993), she discusses stories about reaching troubled children. But instead of a regular classroom teacher Burton writes about a child care teacher in a child care center named Gloria. This lady was named "Armed Services Caregiver of the Year" and she talks about the many different children she has encountered as a child care teacher. She is in a very unique position compared to a regular classroom teacher because she does not have to worry about making lesson plans or teaching a lesson on planets, instead she is able to fully devote her time to her children. These "child care centers are often staffed with underpaid teachers who do have the benefit of extensive formal training in child development or early childhood education" (25). Gloria's tactics in

reaching troubled children seem to be successful. Her stories find their commonality in that these children are the ones who are disliked or unwanted. In trying to help these troubled children, Gloria seeks information about the child's family background and sees how she can best intervene to help the child and the family.

In the case of Adam who was brought up in a home with an abusive father who dominates his mother, Adam learned to do what his father does when he doesn't get his way and he even broke his teacher's necklace. Gloria "talked it out" with him by giving him alternatives to appropriately handle situations when he is not getting his way. In one instance, Adam didn't want to nap on the cot so Gloria asked him what he wanted to do and he asked her, 'Can you hold me?' and 'I want to sit on your lap (26).' Gloria lets the child know that he is accepted and by doing that she allows the child to find that refuge in someone who can sincerely help him. Gloria "relys on a recognition and acceptance of the child's feelings, a provision of choice to build self-esteem, and a building of a feeling of security through routines, thus affecting children's ability to play" (27). Gloria also emphasizes rapport with the parents as well as finding parenting classes or counseling services for them. Gloria is in a unique position in which she can devote all of her time to

individual children at a time rather than one entire class. And it would probably be very difficult to assume the role that Gloria has as a full-time regular classroom teacher. But it is interesting to see the various techniques she uses in recognizing and accepting the childrens' feelings and building their self-esteems and their securities.

Much of the literature found dealing with my topic had to do with "troubled children." In dealing with "troubled children" the question that came up was: "is there something more that teachers can do to mitigate some of these troubled behaviors?" (Wassermann, 1992, 232). Given that there are already demands made on the teacher is a teacher ready to take on the problems of dealing with troubled children? In this article, Wassermann suggests ways to deal with troubled children but does in a way that does not condemn teachers. There is humility in these suggestions as she says that "I too have known the desperate search for "answers," the frustrations of not being able to do enough. I too have felt defeated by inadequate resources, by bureaucratic decisions that seem to work against children and for efficiency, by children who are so deeply troubled that efforts to help appear futile. Yet, I too have found that "seeds planted" may bear fruit in later years, when children find a way of sending back a message, "You helped me. Thank you."

(232). According to Wassermann, teachers can do a lot for children who are in trouble. It only makes sense that teachers are a key link to helping these children because teachers are the only consistent people in their lives for them. It is important to remember that children's behaviors are symptomatic because there is a reason for their behaviors. And teachers need to be sensitive enough to look beyond the behavior and see that a particular child is going through some difficult times. As teachers, we have such a powerful position in the lives of these children because we can actually help them from slipping further backward. We can at least give them a classroom environment where they are nurtured, cared about, and affirmed. Especially at a young age when students look up to their teachers and want to be like them, this can make a crucial impact on the lives of these children. It is okay to feel frustrated, angry, furious, or disappointed as a teacher when you are trying to help a troubled child because it is a disturbing part of the job. It is important that teachers have a source of outlet to deal with their frustrations and their feelings toward the situation. Colleagues, friends, and family members are important for the teacher to get a perspective on dealing with troubled children and in preventing the possibility of burning out.

No matter how experienced the teachers are even the most difficult

situation can cause confusion and frustration for the teacher. There was a study conducted to discover teachers' awareness of stress in the children they teach, their perceptions of their ability to assist children to cope with stress, and their appropriateness of teacher interventions in stress situations of children. In dealing with the stresses of a child, teachers seem to have an awareness of and receptivity to dealing with stressful situations in children's lives. However few teachers feel they have the resources or training to do so (Zucker, 1982). According to Zucker's study, "the teachers report that children bring life-problems to their attention from the lower grades, and continue to do so in the upper elementary grades" (Zucker, 1982, 38). The results of this survey shows that elementary teachers across all grades and a wide span of years of teaching experience are well aware of that children in their classrooms are involved in crisis and chronic stress situations in school and at home. "However, overwhelmingly report that the educational system has done little to enhance their capability (curriculum, materials, facts or skills), with which to implement beneficial interventions" (42).

CHAPTER THREE: *DESIGN OF THE STUDY*

Sample

My subjects were 14 female teachers in a rural town in central Virginia. The SES level in this area is fairly low. The number of years these teachers had taught ranged from three to 25 years, providing varying experience levels of the subjects. A majority of these teachers had taught over ten years. Some of these teachers have taught at the same school for over twenty years. This may have been a factor in some of the responses of not wanting to get as much involved as they could mainly because of the burn out issue. Some of these same teachers seemed to also believe that they cannot make a great impact on these childrens' lives when problems at home are concerned because they believe them to be out of their control.

I assumed that my return rate for returned surveys would be low so I interviewed two fifth-grade classroom teachers, one principal, and one guidance counselor. These interviews were to complement the surveys by giving more thorough feedback in lieu of the lack of surveys I would get back.

My subjects for the students' attitude surveys were 33 fifth graders. These fifth graders consisted of 14 girls and 19 boys.

Measures

To measure the attitudes of the teachers, I created my own survey based on my purpose of the study and the questions I wanted answered in the end. The survey consisted of ten short answer essay questions that ranged from the most prevalent problems teachers find in their children to the biggest hindrances in getting deeply involved in a child's home problem. These ten questions covered most of the areas I wanted answered in the study. Instead of getting checked of answers, I wanted more detailed answers for each question because I knew that each teacher was going to have her/his own detailed opinion to express. **(See Appendix A)**

To measure the attitudes of the students, I also created my own survey based on what kind of things I wanted to find out from these students. Although the survey was anonymous, my questions had to be worded very carefully because of the sensitivity of the topic. There were fourteen multiple choice questions that asked about the problems they may have outside of the school. **(See Appendix B)**

For my interviews, I created my own set of questions. These questions coincided with many of the survey questions since the main purpose for the interviews were to obtain a more thorough and detailed response from the

subjects. I assumed that the return rate for the teacher surveys would be low, therefore I thought the interviews may help me in my study.

(See Appendix C)

Design

After I received all the surveys, I read through each of them and wrote down some notes and organized the responses according to the number of same responses I receive. For the teachers' attitudinal surveys, since there was not a way to organize the responses in a graph/chart form, I analyzed the responses generally. After I read through them and organized them accordingly, I drew some general conclusions from the results. I tried to see whether there was general consensus for each of the questions.

The students' attitudinal surveys were easier to analyze because they were multiple choice questions. After I received all the surveys, I read through all of them and separated them according to the gender of the students. Then I wrote down the number of same responses for each question for boys and girls. After, I figured out the percentages of each response according to gender and then both boys and girls. This showed me whether the gender of the students had any correlation to the way they responded to each question. After the percentages were figured out, I made the graphs on the computer.

The interviews were not analyzed in any specific way. They were only supplementary to my findings in the teachers' attitudinal surveys.

Analysis

After getting all the surveys back, I read through all the surveys and tried to get a general conclusion from them. Since the teachers' attitudinal surveys were short answer questions, I could not get a percentage of the responses. Instead, I gathered the general responses from the surveys. The responses overlapped a few times therefore it was easy to gather a general conclusion.

Summary

In Chapter IV, I will present the results of the teachers and students' attitude surveys. I will explain whether the results correlate with my hypotheses or not and determine any factors that may have affected the results.

CHAPTER IV: *ANALYSIS OF RESULTS*

The results of the surveys correlate well to my general hypotheses. Out of 33 surveys given to teachers, the return rate was only 42% with 14 surveys returned. After a thorough review of the teachers' attitudinal surveys, there seem to be a variety of responses concerning their involvement with students' problems outside of the school. My hypothesis that the teachers would vary in their responses concerning their involvement level with these students because it is dependent on the individual teacher proved true. Although each teacher had her own opinion about how involved she should get in the student's problems at home, the results were divided between the ones who are committed to getting involved compared to the ones who choose to not getting involved as much.

According to these teachers, parental neglect and apathy seems to be one of the major problems that they see in their students' lives. Many of these parents work two-three jobs and have no time for their children therefore the neglect is inevitable. Some parents are too consumed with their own lives and may be involved with a number of abuses such as alcohol or sexual therefore they have no time to raise their children. When there is parental neglect or apathy children are not going to perform as well in schools as they could if

they were involved. This seems to prove true over and over again as I see children who have involved parents function better overall than the ones who have parents who could care less about how they are doing at school.

As the literature review showed, divorce, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, sexual abuse, single-parent homes, live-in boy/girl friends are some of the problems that students in our classrooms are forced to deal with. Although we would like to pretend that these things are not going on in our childrens' lives, it is a reality for most of the children in our classrooms today. The home environment of the students is something that a teacher does not have much control over. Whether we like it or not, the home lives of these children are not going to change dramatically just because we get involved. But there is hope in that teachers can help the children to realize that their futures do not have to look like their present ones.

According to the surveys, the teachers seem to think that the main things that a teacher can do to help the child is to listen and to encourage them. Since teachers are a main part of a child's support system they need to be there for the child to help them cope with their problems. For some children, their teachers can be the only one who can be there for them. Some children may not have many friends to tell their problems to therefore having a

teacher there who is willing to listen to their problems can be extremely helpful for them.

As expected, there are many hindrances for teachers to get involved in the students' home problems. Many of the teachers agreed with several reasons why they do not or cannot get involved in their students' home problems. Almost all of the teachers stated that the time factor is one of the biggest hindrances of getting involved. There are also too many students as well as too many severe problems that they have no control over. Another hindrance is parental opposition and having to deal with defensive parents as well as family resistance to "teacher interference." Some of these teachers constantly think about the childrens and their problems and take them home with them which can easily get in the way of their personal lives. This is where the struggle with priorities come in between their own family and the childrens' problems they take home with them. Although it may seem extreme, sometimes due to the severity of the problem it is inevitable that the teacher will take the problem home with them. Some teachers choose not to get involved because they have not seem much impact on the childrens' lives and so they see no hope in getting involved. One hindrance that may be overlooked is that the children may assume that the teacher can fix things that

are out of her/his control which would bring false hopes for the child. And finally, getting burned out is always an issue with too much involvement. Unfortunately, these hindrances get in the way of teachers getting involved and there is no real way to combat these hindrances because they are hard to deal with. Teachers can work around the hindrances, but ultimately each teacher has to decide for herself/ himself.

The analysis of the students' attitude surveys are extremely interesting. Some of the factors that may have played into the results of the surveys are the lack of seriousness among the students, fear of their problems being exposed, or not being honest. Although only 33 students filled out the surveys, the results are worth looking at. Unfortunately, there are only 58% of the students living with both parents. Many of the other students live with only a mother or a father, with a grandparent, or even with a foster parent. This statistic implies that more students today live in unstable homes which may often lead to other problems in the homes. This statistic complies with the literature review that either because of divorce of a death of a parent, more children today are not living with both parents.

Surprisingly, girls were more likely to say that problems at home were the reason why they came to school feeling bad. This is surprising only

because there is not a particular reason that girls should say this more so than boys would. Possibly, this statistic may merely show that girls are more likely admit that they have problems at home compared to the boys who want to appear like they are fine.

More than 50% of the students do not feel comfortable telling their teachers about their problems. This may have been due to the grade level of the students. One of the teachers I interviewed stated that fifth-graders in general are not very open to their teachers compared to some of the younger children who readily tell their teachers anything that is on their minds. Another factor may be that these fifth grade teachers tend to be more traditional than most teachers which may affect the approachability of the teachers because they tend to be more strict and stern. It is unfortunate that when teachers are supposed to be the ones students go to for their problems when they cannot talk to their parents, in this case it seems that students are not going to their teachers. So to whom or where are these children going to tell their problems?

The results of the surveys show that more than 50% of these students feel most comfortable telling their friends about their problems while only 3% of them want to tell their teachers. What is wrong here? There is nothing

wrong with wanting to tell friends about their problems but students need to know that they can tell their teachers about their problems. These children may not want to tell their teachers about their problems because they are at an age where they are beginning to feel the need to be "cool" and accepted by their friends. They may want to tell their friends because they are peers and they may sympathize or understand better.

As a teacher I would expect to be able to ask my children how they are doing and if there is a specific problem I hope to ask how they are handling that situation. But unfortunately, 70% of the students do not want their teachers asking them questions about their problems. These children may want to keep their problems at home private and not tell anyone about it. Others may feel that they will get in trouble from their parents if they tell their teachers.

Although going on home visits are not a normal thing to do in most schools, 82% of the children said that they do not want their teachers to visit their homes. This could be for several reasons. Since these students are from a low SES area they may not want their teachers coming to see their dirty, poor homes. Even though it may not be that bad, these children may assume that their home is not as good as the teachers and be embarrassed. Also, the

condition of the home may be very unstable and maybe even volatile therefore the children may again be embarrassed to let their teachers see their home life. **(See Appendix D-I for graphs)**

Although the results of the teachers' attitudinal surveys were as expected and correlated well with the hypotheses, the students' attitudinal surveys were surprising because I did not know what to expect. Even the teachers' attitudes were as expected, it was good to have them reinforced in the surveys. The students' attitudes gave new insights into the study which made it very interesting.

CHAPTER V: *SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS*

According to the results of this study, teachers seem to get involved in their students' problems depending on how compelled they are to get involved in the situation. Unfortunately, it is a reality that some children are going to slip through the cracks. It is encouraging though to see that there are some teachers who are making genuine efforts to get deeply involved in their students' lives despite the many hindrances. In my study, I have tried to get a sense of how teachers as well as students feel about the issue of getting involved. The results are not anything remarkable, in fact they are in some ways as expected.

Even though the students I surveyed seem to not want to tell their teachers about their problems, I hope that as teachers we can make an effort to create an inviting atmosphere so that students can come and approach us about their problems. Although there were factors that played into the results of the students' surveys, we are doing something wrong if only 3% of the children in our classes want to tell their teachers about their problems. Although, a teacher's role is not like a guidance counselor or a psychiatrist, who sit and listen to problems all day, nevertheless teachers should be a part of a child's support system. This means that the teacher should listen as well as encourage

and help the child within the teachers' means. In conclusion, a teacher's decision to get involved is ultimately up to the individual. In making a decision to get involved with a child's problem outside of the school, teachers must consider that their efforts can make a big difference, more than they may ever realize.

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ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' ATTITUDES OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH STUDENTS' PROBLEMS OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL *(APPENDIX A)*

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:

Female Male

Grade Level/Subject you teach:

How many years have you been teaching?

Marital status: (optional)
If married, do you have any children?

DIRECTIONS: Please respond to these questions as accurately as possible. I would appreciate it very much if the responses were as detailed as possible. Your responses are extremely vital to my study. Thank you very much!!

1. Which type of problem (outside of the school) have you had to deal with the most with your students (divorce, sexual abuse, alcohol, etc...)?

2. Can you usually pick out the students in your classroom who are going through some problems outside of the school? Are there specific symptoms in these children that you have noticed from your past experience?

3. What steps would you take or have you taken in the past to help your students who came to you and told you that she/he was going through a parents' divorce?

4. Have you ever gone on home visits to your students' homes? If so, what was the purpose and how was the experience? Did it help the situation?

5. What do you think is the biggest hindrance or the most difficult thing in getting deeply involved with your students' problems outside of the school? Is the problem of getting burned out an issue for you?

6. Do you remember one particular student you had in the past who you got deeply involved with and the results were a success? Please explain the experience.

7. Do you remember a situation where your efforts failed with a particular student?
Please explain.

8. Do you recall a situation where looking back now you wish you had gotten more involved with a student? What was your reason for not getting as involved?

9. Do you feel equipped to help a troubled child who is forced to deal with problems outside of the classroom such as divorce, sexual abuse, alcohol abuse, etc..? Why or why not?

10. As a teacher do you think that your role is to refer your students to a guidance counselor instead of getting "too" involved? Why or why not?

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES SURVEY *(APPENDIX B)*

DIRECTIONS: Please answer these questions as best as you can. Circle your answers. Thank you!!

1. Female Male

2. Who takes care of you at home? Answer all that applies.

mom dad aunt grandmother/father other_____

3. Do you like coming to school? Yes No

4. How do you usually feel when you come to school?

sad happy angry hurt don't care

5. When you come to school feeling bad what is the reason usually? Problems with:

grades classmates home teacher other_____

6. Do you feel comfortable telling your teacher about any problems you may have at home? Yes No

7. Do you have any problems outside of the school? If yes, briefly list them.

_____

8. If you can't concentrate in school what is your biggest reason?

parents classmates babysitter brothers/sisters

9. If you told your teacher about the problems you may have at home do you think this would help you to concentrate better in school?

Yes No

10. Who do you feel the most comfortable with in telling your problems to?

teacher friends counselor principal

11. Which teacher do you think has helped you the most with the problems you had outside of the school?

kindergarten 1st grade 2nd grade 3rd grade

4th grade 5th grade

12. Would you want your teacher to ask you questions and talk with you about your problems outside of the school (at home)?

Yes No

13. If you don't want to tell your teacher about your problems outside of the school the reasons are usually because:

embarrassed shy uncomfortable with teacher parents

14. Do you want your teacher to come to your home and visit you if there are problems at home?

Yes No

HEY, YOU'RE FINISHED!! THANKS SO MUCH FOR HELPING ME WITH THIS!!

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS-*ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' ATTITUDES OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH STUDENTS' PROBLEMS OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL (APPENDIX C)*

INTERVIEWEES: Teacher A, Teacher B, Guidance Counselor, Principal

1. Do you see a great need in your classroom to get involved in the personal lives of the students?

2. What kind of problems outside of the school seems most prevalent in your class? or with the students that you have in the years you have taught?

3. Do you find yourself not wanting to get involved because you don't want "to get too deep" into the students' personal life? Is it too time-consuming?

4. Can you tell me the most recent situation where you got involved in a child's home life? What happened?

5. Is burning out one of your concerns?

6. What do you think would be the best thing to do if you have a student who has a major problem at home? As a teacher do you think that the role is for the guidance counselor to handle?

7. Do you prefer to just deal with the classroom problems and teach the content rather than to get involved in a child's problem outside of the school?

8. Have you ever visited a child's home? What was the reason? How was the experience for you? Do you think you made some kind of impact?

9. Do you feel helpless sometimes because there are so many children who are in need of emotional help because of home problems but there is just not enough time for you as a teacher?

10. What would be an ideal situation for you as a teacher in dealing with the problems students deal with outside of the school?

COUNSELOR: (additional questions)

1. What kind of things do you do as a guidance counselor?

2. Do you think that your role is to get more involved than the teacher? What do you think the role of the teacher is in dealing with troubled children?

3. Have you had any conflicts with the teachers concerning the level of involvement in a child's home life?

PRINCIPAL: (additional questions)

1. Do you go on home visits?

2. What is your role as a principal in dealing with troubled children?

3. How do you work with the teacher and the guidance counselor? Where do you come in?

4. Do you find yourself wanting to get more involved in these childrens' problems outside of the school but not being able to? Why or why not?

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX E

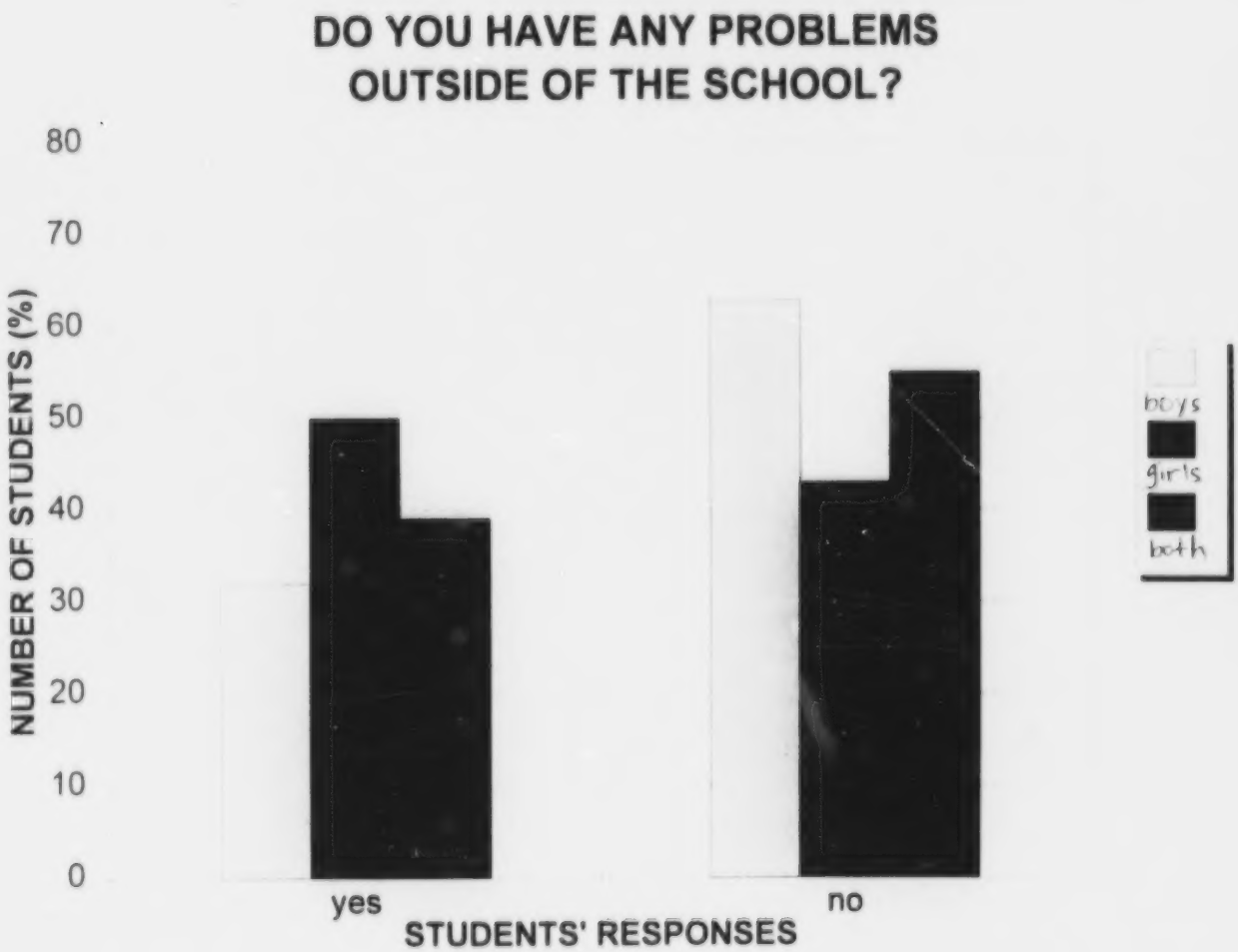
APPENDIX F

APPENDIX G

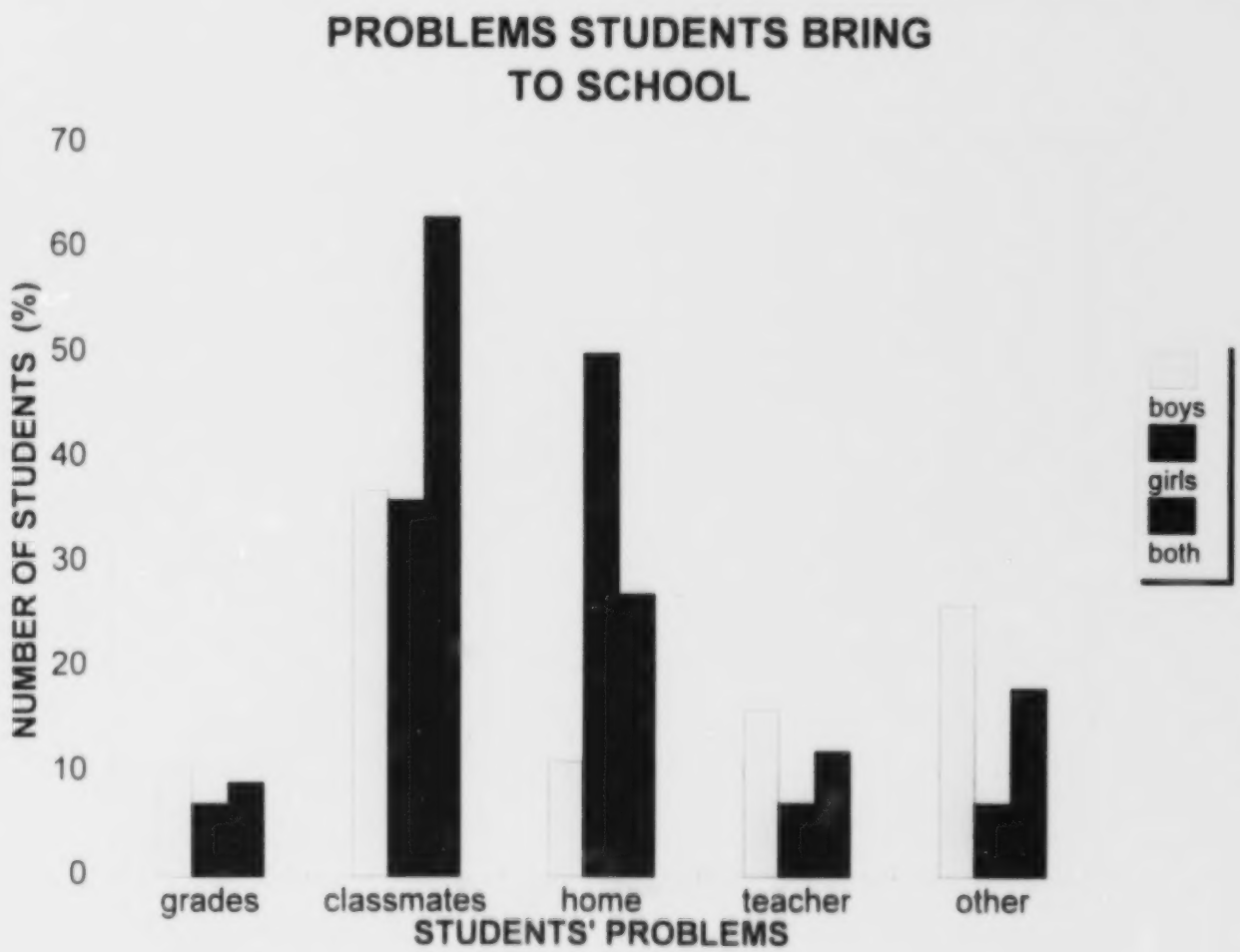
APPENDIX H

APPENDIX I

APPENDIX D

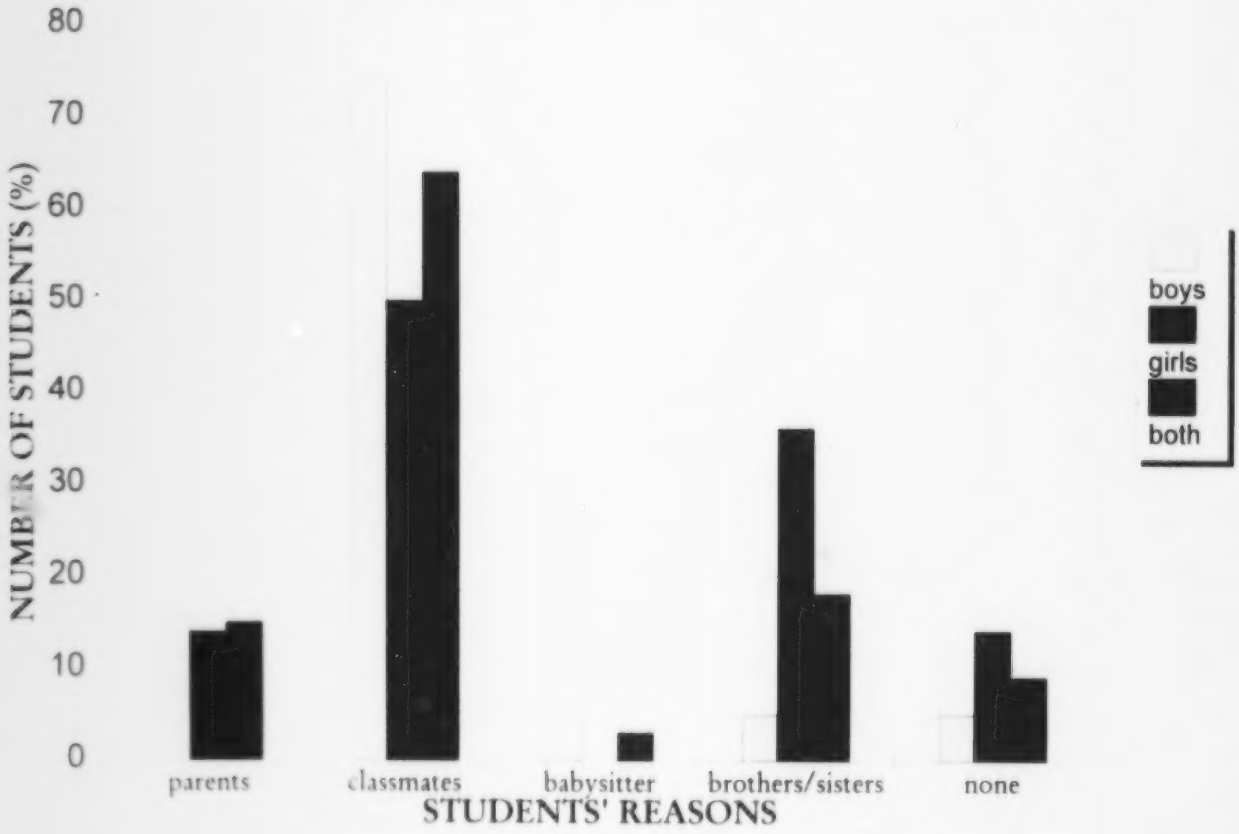

DO YOU HAVE ANY PROBLEMS OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL?
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
NUMBER OF STUDENTS (%)
yes
no
STUDENTS' RESPONSES
boys
girls
both

APPENDIX E

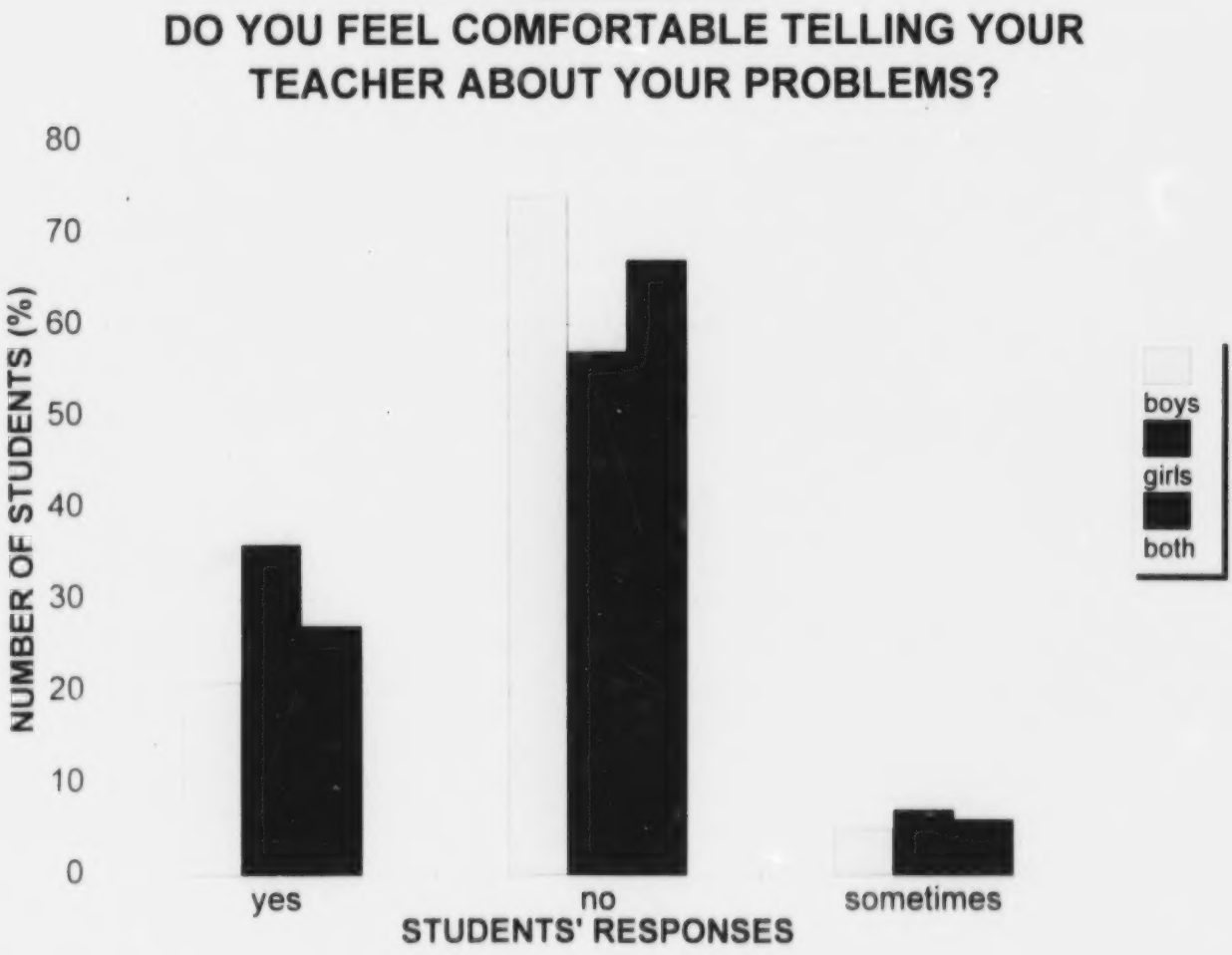

PROBLEMS STUDENTS BRING TO SCHOOL
NUMBER OF STUDENTS (%)
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
grades
classmates
home
teacher
other
STUDENTS' PROBLEMS
boys
girls
both

APPENDIX F

BIGGEST REASON WHY STUDENTS CANNOT CONCENTRATE IN SCHOOL

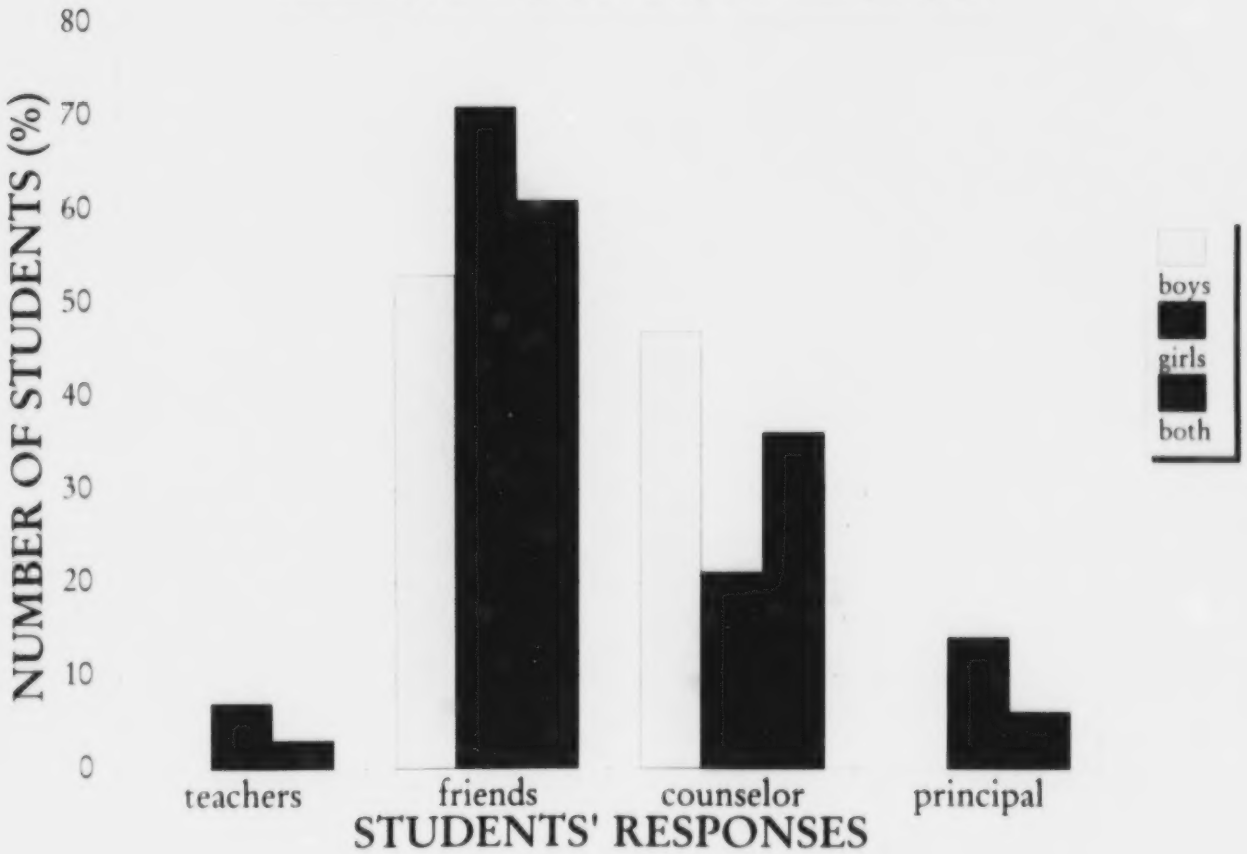


APPENDIX G

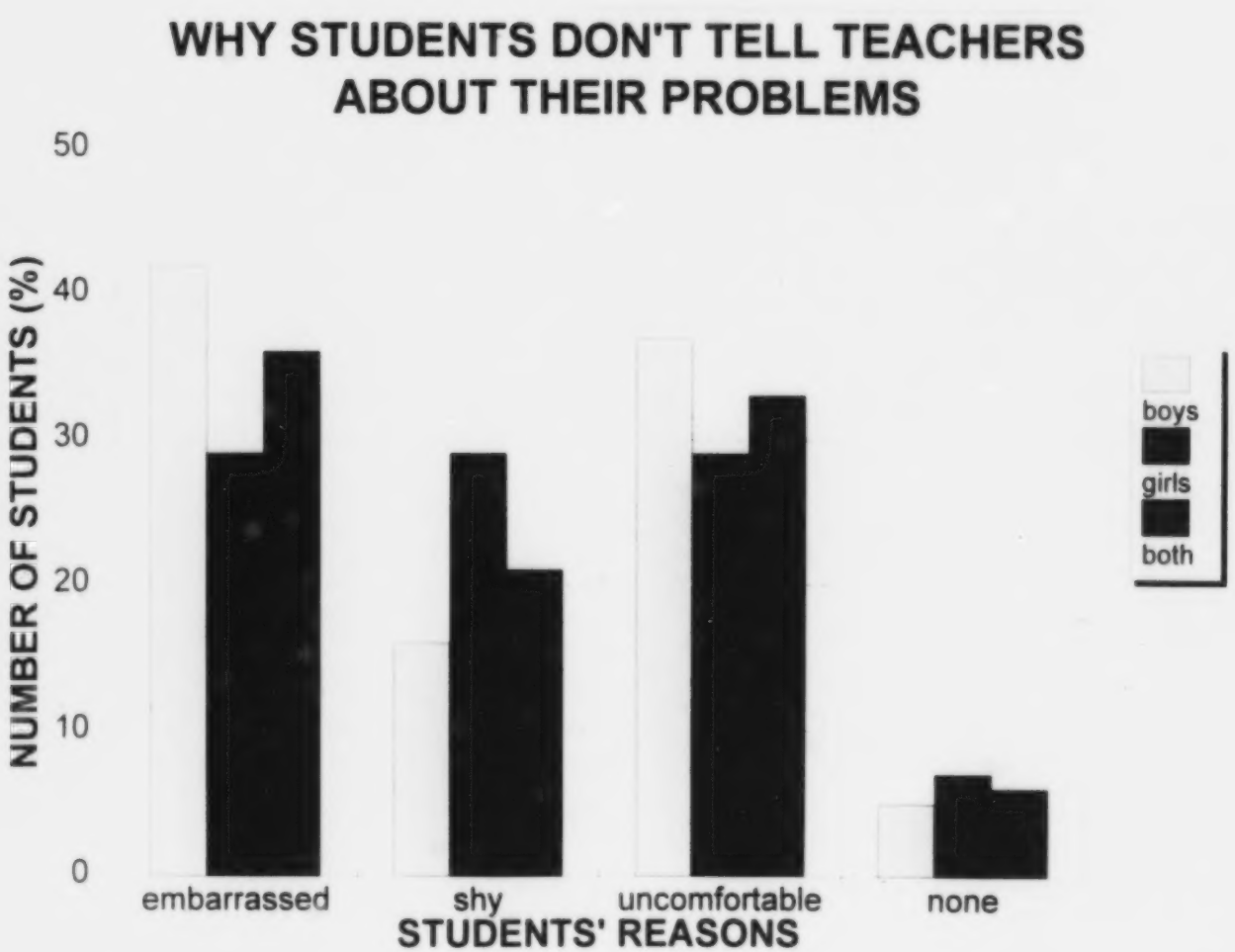

DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE TELLING YOUR TEACHER ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS?
NUMBER OF STUDENTS (%)
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
yes
no
sometimes
STUDENTS' RESPONSES
boys
girls
both

APPENDIX H

WHO DO YOU FEEL THE MOST COMFORTABLE TELLING YOUR PROBLEMS TO?



APPENDIX I


WHY STUDENTS DON'T TELL TEACHERS ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS
NUMBER OF STUDENTS (%)
50
40
30
20
10
0
embarrassed
shy
uncomfortable
none
STUDENTS' REASONS
boys
girls
both